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BJD support for dermatology Journal Clubs: nurturing Sir William Osler's legacy

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By the time you have finished reading this editorial, several new medical articles will have been published disproving facts that we learnt at medical school and until now took for granted. Lifelong learning sounds like a no-brainer, but how do we achieve this in practice? Medical journals offer the most up to date information, yet with the dozens of dermatology journals in existence and numerous dermatology articles in general medical publications, it is impossible for individual clinicians to keep up to date with the literature. Journal clubs provide a forum for clinicians to learn about the newest developments in their field and manage the constant barrage of new information published in medical journals. Careful selection of articles, succinct presentation of the article's core messages and subsequent discussions, including a critical appraisal of evidence quality, facilitate understanding and allow an assessment of the relevance and quality of the new knowledge.

Yet the concept of a journal club is not a new one. Medical journal clubs have existed for almost 150 years, with the earliest description found in the biography of Sir James Paget (from 1835-1854) of a group of students from St Bartholomew's Hospital, who met in "a small room over a baker's shop near the Hospital-gate where we could sit and read the journals and where some, in the evening played cards".¹ However, it is Sir William Osler at McGill University in Montreal in 1875 who is most frequently credited as the founder (Fig 1). With individual subscriptions to medical periodicals prohibitively expensive, the earliest journal clubs were conceived primarily to disseminate newly published knowledge. Since then journal clubs have evolved from the original aim of sharing knowledge, to keeping up to date in the 1960s and 70s, to a forum for teaching critical appraisal and evidence-based medicine and also developing presentation skills (Fig 2).^{2,3} Journal clubs are an established forum worldwide and may take a number of different formats. Attendance at journal clubs and involvement in presentations and discussion are a means of covering aspects of the dermatology training curriculum. Poorly conducted journal clubs that discuss less relevant articles and include no critical appraisal may be viewed as a boring waste of time, a tick-box necessity and a time to switch off mentally from the other relentless demands of clinical medicine. Yet, with the

time pressures of modern medical practice and the need to optimise educational meetings, a well-organised journal club can be a great way for teams to keep up to date, learn together, and stimulate scholarly debate.

One of the most common formats is the presentation of a research paper and then an in-depth discussion and critical appraisal of its findings. The art of a successful journal club is for the presenter to succinctly describe the study, covering the setting, methodology, results and implications, and discussing its internal and external validity, while leaving plenty of time for discussion. To facilitate journal club presentations, the BJD website now provides a set of PowerPoint slides that can be downloaded and used by presenters, who can then concentrate on adding their own comments and thoughts regarding the paper. The slides will be available soon after the article is first published online and prior to print publication.

The key to a successful journal club is not only the presentation itself, but the quality of the subsequent debate. Contributions from those attending set the research in context and wider discussions enhance understanding of the work being presented. Research publications are not the end of the road but rather a starting point for subsequent debate and post-publication peer review. Attendees at journal club may agree or disagree with the research methodology and findings based on their own experience and expertise and may identify new questions highlighted by the findings. The BJD wishes to encourage post-publication peer review, which can commence as soon as the paper is published on the BJD website in early view format. Our new website encourages submission of immediate comments, which are posted as a thread linked to the article within a couple of days, following a brief editorial check. Readers can then follow the discussion and contribute their own thoughts. Authors of the very best comments will be invited to submit a Letter to the Editor which will be published in the same issue as the original article when it appears in print a few months later. A response from the authors of the Original Article will be sought to enrich the debate.

Our intention is to promote active discussion around articles published in the BJD, bringing the research alive and encouraging our community of readers to get involved. Provision of a set of slides for each article will allow journal club presenters to focus on the subsequent debate and critical appraisal. The next step is to keep a record of the discussion and use it as a springboard to submitting an online comment and a subsequent Letter to the Editor. So go ahead, download a set of BJD Journal Club slides and build on Sir William Osler's legacy. We are waiting to hear from you.

Figure 1. Sir William Osler, 1849-1919

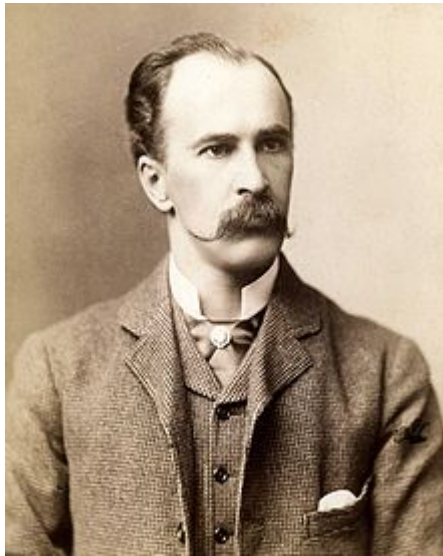


Figure 2. Functions of Journal Club

- To encourage practice of evidence-based medicine
- To keep up to date with new medical knowledge
- To improve clinical practice and patient care
- To provide a forum for teaching aspects of the post-graduate training curriculum
- To enhance presentation skills
- To develop skills in critical appraisal
- To share the experience and expertise of a department
- To provide an opportunity for departments to come together and for team-building
- To teach research methodology and encourage participation in the research process
- To stimulate submission of comments and letters to the journal, developing writing skills
- To ensure post-publication peer review, adding value to the original research

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